

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 071 821

RC 006 712

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 TITLE The Perception of Community Power in Two Rural Louisiana Communities.
 PUB DATE 6 Feb 73
 NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Southern Agricultural Workers, Atlanta, Georgia, February 6, 1973
 EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
 DESCRIPTORS *Caucasians; Community Study; Ethnic Studies; *Negroes; *Perception; *Power Structure; Racial Characteristics; *Rural Areas; Sociocultural Patterns; Southern Community; Statistical Analysis; Tables (Data)
 IDENTIFIERS *Louisiana

ABSTRACT

The study reported here focused on the perception which rank-and-file members of a community have of its power structure. This research was designed specifically to investigate the relationship of power perception to the socio-cultural variables of locality, race, age, education, and income. A random sample of households in 2 Louisiana communities was taken and 243 male heads of households were interviewed. The 2 study communities were selected by judgment as representative of Anglo-Protestant North Louisiana and French-Catholic South Louisiana sub-cultures, respectively. Of all the independent variables included in the analysis, statistically significant differences were found only by race. It was found that blacks tended to name individuals who may be influential within the black community, but are only peripheral to the larger community power structure. It was also found that some of the upper status-level respondents were somewhat reluctant to acknowledge power actors, possibly because they feel autonomous to the power actors. The reasons for finding no differences between education and income levels are undoubtedly questions with complex answers that need further study. (HBC)

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THE PERCEPTION OF COMMUNITY POWER IN
TWO RURAL LOUISIANA COMMUNITIES

by

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Introduction

The study reported here focused on the perception which rank-and-file members of a community have of its power structure. Much research has been conducted on the upper echelons of the power continuum, that is, those power actors who comprise control groups within the community; however, studies by Lynd and Lynd (1929 & 1937), West (1945), Warner (1941), Hunter (1953), Vidich and Bensman (1960), Dahl (1961), and others have ignored rank-and-file members' perception of the community power structure or paid it little more than casual attention. Presthus (1963), Jenkins (1966), and O'Carroll (1971) are exceptions in that all have examined the relationships of rank-and-file members perception to that of the elites.

The social dimension of power may be recognized at the community level; for the power is in large measure a result of the individual's capacity to manipulate this larger system of which he is a part. Power is created and generated within the context of social interaction and human relationships. The community is, in a sense, the meeting place of the individual and the larger society and culture. It is here, in his own

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociology Section of ASAW, February 6, 1973, Atlanta, Ga.

locality setting, that the individual confronts his society's institutions, its manner of religious and economic expression, its modes of regulating behavior, etc.. It is also within this community context that ongoing systems of power relationships are realized.

Perception of community power serves as one indicator of the community's ability to respond insofar as it indicates the ties between the rank-and-file and their leaders, and the homogeneity of attitude among the rank-and-file.

This research was designed to specifically investigate the relationship of power perception to the socio-cultural variables of locality, race, age, education and income.

Methodology

Sample

Two hundred forty-three male heads of households were interviewed from a systematic random sample of households in two Louisiana communities. The two study communities were selected by judgment as representative of Anglo-Protestant North Louisiana and French-Catholic South Louisiana sub-cultures, respectively. The populations of the two communities were as nearly equal as could be obtained.

Anglo-Protestant town serves as a market for farm products, provides professional services, banking facilities, supplies major production goods needed by the farm industry, and offers the necessities and conveniences of life for a major portion of the parish's population. Anglo-Protestant town had 6,432 residents in 1970, an increase of 593 over the 1960 figure of 5,839 persons; 52% white and 48% black.

French-Catholic town is located in an overwhelmingly agricultural parish; crops include sugar cane, corn, and rice. The land surrounding French-Catholic town is in the heart of Louisiana's "sugar bowl". In 1970, the population of the French-Catholic town was 4,942, an increase of 49.6% over the 1960 figure of 3,303 persons; 71% white and 29% black.

Determination of Power Knowledge Score

The reputational approach which essentially consists of asking respondents who they perceive as influential or powerful people in their community was used to identify power actors. This approach stems from Hunter's now classic study of community

power in "Regional City". The dependent variable, the power knowledge score, was conceptualized as the degree to which an individual's perception of which community members are powerful, coincides with the perception of the power structure held by the more informed sector of the public.

In each town, a panel of six community knowledgeable or judges were asked who they perceived as powerful or influential in their community in terms of bringing about action they desired or in terms of preventing action they did not support. These community knowledgeable represented the various institutional sectors and issue areas in their home communities and they were judgmentally chosen by the researcher for their knowledge of and affiliation with community affairs.

In the French-Catholic community, the panel of knowledgeable included a bank executive, a state representative, the agriculture cooperative extension agent, a city councilman, the cooperative extension home economist and a businessman. The knowledgeable selected in the Anglo-Protestant community included the mayor and banker, the policy jury president, a former state senator, the agricultural cooperative extension agent, the sheriff and the cooperative extension service home economist.

For analytical purposes, the power actors pool was delimited to ten persons in the French-Catholic community and to nine in the Anglo-Protestant community. Influentials eliminated by this procedure were mentioned by only one knowledgeable so that those retained in the pool were more representative of the collective thinking of the panel of knowledgeable than were those who were eliminated.

The power actors listed by the knowledgeable were assigned weighted scores by the following procedure:

1. The number of times a power actor was mentioned by the six knowledgeable was totaled.
2. The total scores of all power actors in a given community were summed.
3. The percentage of the community total an individual received was used as his power score.

For example, a power actor who was mentioned by five knowledgeable in a community with 36 as the total score of all power actors listed would receive a score of $5/36$ or 13.9

and a respondent who was mentioned twice would receive a score of 5.6.

Power actor knowledge scores for rank-and-file respondents were determined by summing the scores of the power actors he listed. If a respondent listed all the names in the power actor pool designated by the knowledgeable, his score would be 100. If he mentioned none, his score would be zero. The sample range was 0-62.9.

Analysis of Data

The power knowledge scores were subjected to least squares analysis of variance by the following independent variables: locality, race, age, education, income, town by race, and age by race. Interval level data were used for the education and income variables. Age data was divided into three categories: 17-39; 40-59; and 60 and over.

Results and Discussion

Power Actor Pool

Occupational positions of the designated power actors in each community are shown in Tables I and II with the number of times each was mentioned by knowledgeable and rank-and-file respondents.

As can be seen from Table I, six of the nine influentials identified in the Anglo-Protestant community were from the business sector. The sheriff and the registrar of voters were representative of the governmental sector and a white protestant minister represented the religious sector.

The majority of the power actors were found to be active outside their institutional sector and issue areas. In other words, power leaders were influential across the board. The Anglo-Protestant community power structure could be labeled as monomorphic, because no factions were apparent among the power group.

The sector representativeness from the French-Catholic community was almost identical to that of the Anglo-Protestant community in that five members were business leaders, three were government representatives and one was from the religious sector. An additional category, cultural, was represented by one man.

TABLE I. Occupational Positions of Power Actors in Anglo-Saxon Community and the Number of Times Mentioned by Knowledgeables and Rank-and-File Respondents

Position	No. of Times Mentioned by Rank-and-File	No. of Times Mentioned by Knowledgeables
Mayor and President of Local Bank	46	6
Realtor & Former State Representative	38	3
Oil Speculator & Land Developer	31	5
Owner, Motor Co. & Bank Executive	29	3
Owner, Sawmill Enterprise & Liquor Store	29	6
Sheriff	16	6
Pastor	13	4
President of C. of C. & Registrar of Voters	10	2
Funeral Home Director*	10	1

*Denotes Black Leaders

TABLE II. Occupational Positions of Power Actors in French-Catholic Community and the Number of Times Mentioned by Knowledgeables and Rank-and-File Respondents

Position	No. of Times Mentioned by Rank-and-File	No. of Times Mentioned by Knowledgeables
Mayor & Owner of Hardware Enterprise	59	6
Bank President & Former State Representative	40	6
Present State Representative	29	6
Owner, Motor Company	14	5
Bank President	13	6
Police Jury Member & Gas Distributor	6	6
Local Furniture Store Owner	7	2
Pastor	6	4
Chief of Police	5	4
President of Acadian Festival	5	1

One major difference existed between the two communities: the rank-and-file respondents from the French-Catholic community claimed there were two almost equal sections of power active in the community. Therefore, the power structure of the French-Catholic community was labeled polymorphic.

Rank-and-File Power Perception Scores

Results of least squares analysis of variance for the dependent variable, power perception, are shown in Table III.

Table III. Results of Least Squares Analysis of Variance of Power Perception Scores of Rank-and-File Males in Two Louisiana Communities

Source	DF	Sums of Squares	F Value	Prob. F
Total	240	6917873.4		
Town	1	1606.9	0.0576	0.8058
Race	1	236643.0	8.4823	0.0042
Age	2	92597.6	1.6596	0.1905
Town x Race	1	24963.7	0.89481	0.6527
Race x Age	2	13088.8	0.23458	0.7940
Education	1	10743.7	0.38510	0.5427
Income	1	9199.6	0.32975	0.5735
Error	231	6444521.0		

Of all the independent variables included in the analysis, statistically significant differences were found only by race. The adjusted mean score of the white respondents was 21.7 while the adjusted mean score of the black respondents was 13.5. The race difference was significant at the .01 level of probability. Although the age differences were not significant, it is interesting to note the power perception scores tended to decrease for increased age levels.

It is the judgment of the researcher that the differential in power for whites and blacks arises from a variable pattern of social relations for the two racial groups. Up to the present, the Negro has remained mostly socially and morally

isolated from the larger community in which he lives. Negro class structure, associations, and institutions have emerged in response to segregation, and represent an adjustment to the isolation under which Negroes have lived.

This situation is especially characteristic of social and racial relations in both communities studied. Racial relations indicate a tendency toward subordination on the part of the Negro. Despite outward signs of desegregation, and these are only minimal, blacks in both study communities were only distantly related to community activities.

Blacks tended to name individuals who may be influential within the black community, but are only peripheral to the larger community power structure. These black leaders are in large part mere figureheads, as they possess no real power beyond the sub-community level. Even that power is somewhat limited. As one astute black respondent noted, "Some of the black leaders can help bring about action, but none of them can prevent action".

G. Franklin Edwards (Heller, 1969:388) has observed:

The segregation of Negroes from the mainstream of American life has produced institutional patterns and behavior which have a bearing upon contemporary efforts to eliminate inequalities between the two major racial groups. The behaviors are expressed as deviations of Negroes from many normative patterns of American life and suggest something of the magnitude of the differentials which must be dealt with if reconciliation, rather than further alienation, is to be achieved.

It is therefore necessary that we recognize the significance of race on perception of power in the community, as well as in other areas of social life.

It might be expected that those who were more educated and who had higher incomes would be more aware of the power structure than those with less education and income. However, it should be remembered that the two study communities are small towns where nearly everyone knows everyone else. Status and knowledge of community affairs may be more dependent on the personality and daily contacts of the individual than on more objective criteria, such as income and education. For example, a grocery clerk may talk with more people about community affairs in his work day and be better known by others than will a school teacher.

Consideration should also be given to the idea that those in lower status positions feel that they are at the mercy of others more than do those with greater status. This viewpoint

was substantiated somewhat by comments of the respondents. Some of the upper status level respondents were somewhat reluctant to acknowledge power actors, possibly because they are too close to the source of power themselves or possibly because they feel autonomous to the power actors.

The reasons for finding no differences between education and income levels are undoubtedly questions with complex answers that need further study. Certainly, perception of community power is related to an individual's concept of his ability to manipulate his own future.

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